

WHO SEARO Holds Intercountry Meeting

Meeting tracks progress of elimination program in member countries.

An Intercountry Meeting of National Program Managers for Leprosy Elimination was held in Kathmandu, Nepal from January 6 to 8 to discuss the progress of leprosy elimination in the WHO South-East Asia Region. Forty-five participants from 10 leprosy endemic countries (except DPR Korea) and representatives of NGOs were invited.

For India and Nepal, the two countries yet to achieve elimination, the most critical and priority activities for 2005 are routine case confirmation prior to registration, monthly updating of registers and capacity building of health staff in order to minimize the 'operational factors' influencing prevalence and new case detections. They were also urged to place staff trained and experienced in leprosy in priority and problem pockets.

In order to ensure quality of new case detection, programs should ensure that case finding is mainly focused on promoting self-reporting; strict adherence is maintained to case definitions as per WHO/National guidelines; confirmation of new cases by a competent health staff/MO prior to

registration and initiation of MDT is carried out; and previously treated cases are not registered as new cases, even if they require MDT.

It was also recommended that India and Nepal adopt 'Accompanied MDT' as a policy for certain groups, such as patients from hard-to-reach and distant areas, migrant labor, floating urban population, and nomads.

For countries that have achieved elimination at the national level and are aiming at sub-national elimination, several recommendations were made.

Among them were the suggestions that they consider a shift to 'new case detection' instead of prevalence as the primary indicator once sub-national elimination has been achieved, develop mechanisms for counseling of patients and family members in all aspects of the disease and its treatment, and develop the required organizational set-up to ensure strengthening and sustaining of quality leprosy services within selected facilities in an integrated set-up, in close coordination with all partners. ■

LETTER

BUILDING A PLATFORM

As a person affected by leprosy, it has been my experience that not enough has been done to address the social aspects of the disease. I reached the conclusion that the only way to tackle discriminatory talk and behavior is to set up a place where we can bridge the communication gap between people affected by leprosy and the rest of society. We need to build a platform where recovered persons can be counted as normal, healthy individuals and as useful citizens. To this end, I have dedicated my efforts to establishing a community where recovered persons live alongside other members of society, and where there is no fear of the disease, nor discrimination based on caste or creed. "Rock Land Colony" is now home to nearly 2,000 families. Our task is to build up the courage of the cured, and create a social environment for them, as only they can pave the way to a world free from leprosy.

Md. Sala Huddin
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FROM THE EDITORS

NEARLY THERE

We are now in the final months of the WHO campaign to eliminate leprosy as a public health problem. Already, thoughts are turning to a post-elimination strategy that focuses on sustaining achievements to date and further reducing the disease burden at the local level.

Creating conditions that enable those touched by the disease to lead normal lives free from discrimination must also be a priority. The best people to bring about change, we believe, are the leprosy-affected themselves. WHO Goodwill Ambassador Sasakawa recently encountered an inspiring example in Malak Singh Shrivastav, whose story he relates in Ambassador's Journal.

The successful farmer from Madhya Pradesh, India, despaired when diagnosed with leprosy and considered taking his own life. But after being cured with MDT, he now extends a helping hand to others and speaks out about his experiences. He has become a committed social advocate, encouraging those affected by the disease to believe in themselves and the possibilities of life after cure.

FOR THE ELIMINATION OF LEPROSY

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